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To: Randal_Bowman@ios.doi.gov
Subject: DCN: EST-00003346 - Antiquities Act
Date: Monday, July 10, 2017 9:43:09 AM
Attachments: [3346 in.pdf](#)

Tasked to OIEA.



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June 7, 2017

Serial: 437

The Honorable
Ryan Z. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Talofa Secretary, this letter is a response to your May 12th letter asking for my input on monuments in the Pacific. Mr. Secretary, over 30% of US waters in the Pacific are closed to fishing because of National Monuments. The trend of closing areas to the US fishing fleet must be stopped and if possible reversed.

The tuna industry in American Samoa accounts for nearly 80% of our economy. Until recently American Samoa was the home to two canneries that served as the economic backbone of our economy. Six months ago one of our canneries, Samoa Tuna Processors, suspended their canning operations indefinitely and 800 workers lost their employment. This equated to a 5% increase in our unemployment moving it from 10% to 15%. The ripple effects of this closure are still being felt as many fishing boats who delivered their catch to this cannery no longer visit our ports. These boats no longer resupply, refuel, or spend their money in our restaurants and hotels. This is a loss of millions of dollars to our economy.

A central reason for this closure is the lacking fish supply. Catching fish is the foundation of the tuna industry and that means we need ocean to catch them. Sadly, in recent years the creation of National Monuments has greatly reduced fishing grounds in the Pacific. In 2000 President Clinton created the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Reserve. President Bush established the Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument ("PMNM") in 2006 and the Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands and Rose Atoll monuments in 2009. President Obama expanded the Pacific Remote Islands monument in 2014 from 83,000 square miles to 490,000 square miles. The latest expansion occurred on August 26, 2016, when President Obama increased the size of the PMNM making it the largest marine protected area in the world.

A specific example of how these monuments affect American Samoa is the Pacific Remote Islands monument which encompasses Johnston Atoll, Jarvis Island, Wake Island, Howland and

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Baker Islands, Palmyra Atoll, and Kingman Reef. These areas are traditional fishing grounds for U.S. flag tuna vessels operating out of American Samoa and Hawaii. It is my understanding that the US fishing industry was not even consulted before the expansion of this monument in 2014. These unilateral decisions are hurting an already suffering industry.

It must be remembered that these monuments are not established after a thorough scientific process. These monuments are established through a Presidential designation under the Antiquities act. The Magnusson Stevens act is the body of law that manages the fisheries and it is done through a scientific process. If conservation is the goal, then it should be done through that process and not the ill suited Antiquities act.

In addition to restrictions because of national monuments, US fishing fleets must adhere to restrictions on fishing in the high seas and catch quotas. In recent years the US purse seine fishing fleet has fought for an economically reasonable South Pacific Tuna Treaty to gain access to foreign fishing grounds, but talks have proved difficult. To make matters worse we have been made aware that international groups are pushing harder to further restrict fishing on the high seas.

Foreign countries charge our boats \$12,500 dollars a day to fish in their waters. NMFS has cut back our ability to fish on the high seas and with these monuments in place we struggle to even fish in our own backyard. Prohibitive federal policies have hampered our only industry. Imposing the federal minimum wage contributed to the demise of Van Camp Samoa Packing in 2009 and Samoa Tuna Processing in 2016 and continues to negatively impact our only remaining tuna processing company StarKist. The withdrawal of federal incentives such as the IRC Section 936 and recently Section 30(A) Tax Credit along with the drastically watered down Headnote 3(a) have further corroded our canneries' competitive advantage. If the federal government wants the demise of the US tuna industry, then we are on that path. However, please realize that at this time the economy of American Samoa is tied to that fate.

In short, the trend of closing areas to the US fishing fleet must be curtailed. While conservation is important it must be balanced with the economic needs of the Pacific Island Territories and Hawaii. If the US fishing industry is to survive in the Pacific, there must be ocean to fish.

Therefore, I would ask that monument designations in the Pacific be removed to allow US fleets to fish in these lucrative areas. If total removal is not an option, then I ask that all fishing restrictions in all Marine National Monuments be removed. If neither of these options is available then the United States must find a way to compensate American Samoa for the use of its waters. If we cannot benefit from the use of these waters then we must find another way to help our economy become more sustainable.

Thank you Mr. Secretary for taking your time to listen to our concerns. I am encouraged by this administration's desire to put America first. I hope that applies to American Samoa and our tuna industry.

Sincerely,



LOLO M. MOLIGA
Governor of American Samoa

cc: The Honorable Lieutenant Governor, Lemanu P. Mauga
The Honorable Member of Congress, Aumua Amata Radewagen
The Honorable President of the Senate, Gaoteote P. Tofau
The Honorable Speaker of the House, Savali Talavou Ale
The Honorable Director Office of Insular Affairs, Nikolao Pula